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Senate

LOW INCOME HOUSING ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. President, when I was governor of Delaware I was guided by a principle I learned years ago--if something is worth doing, it's worth paying for.

I served from 1993 to 2001, and we balanced the budget every year I was in office.

The principle of paying for the things that are worth doing is not always easy to follow. In fact, sometimes it's quite difficult.

It's especially difficult when we face the choice of how to fund important programs that we know provide vital services.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP, is one of these important programs.

I believe that LIHEAP is worth funding and I think it's worth paying for.

And we need to pay for it because we are now in the unfortunate situation of

having been saddled with record budget deficits for as far as the eye can see.

Unfortunately, more often than not, the current administration has shown us the opposite of good fiscal leadership. Instead of sticking to the motto, "if it's worth doing, it's worth paying for," this administration has chosen to cut taxes and increase spending more than any other administration in the past 30 years. The result: record budget deficits and a bleak fiscal outlook.

This administration has turned the largest budget surplus in history into the largest deficits in history.

It is for these reasons that we must consider how to pay for increased funding for this vital program and for others as well.

The Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee took an important step toward providing adequate LIHEAP funds by including \$2.183 billion in their fiscal year 2006 committee-reported bill.

This represents a small increase over last year's funding levels. This is a good starting point.

However, we know that energy prices are rising and household heating bills will rise accordingly this winter. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, consumers who heat their homes with natural gas prices--about 55 percent of U.S. households--are expected to see their heating bills rise by 48 percent this winter. Those who heat with oil will pay 32 percent more, those who heat with propane will pay 30 percent more, and those who heat with electricity will pay 5 percent more.

For that reason, I contacted the Appropriations Committee in September to express the need for increased funding. I urged that they provide \$1.276 billion in emergency LIHEAP funding as part of a comprehensive supplemental appropriations bill to address Hurricane Katrina and the effects it has had on energy production and the cost of energy for U.S. consumers. This additional funding would provide an approximately 60 percent increase over fiscal year 2005 levels.

Unfortunately, we have not yet had the opportunity to consider a Katrina supplemental and during the week of October 24, 2005 we were faced with the choice of how to increase funds for LIHEAP as part of the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill.

I am not comfortable supporting a \$3.1 billion increase in LIHEAP funding if it is not offset by either a reduction in spending or an increase in revenues. I

believe that we can increase funds for LIHEAP but I also believe that we need to pay for it.

As a result, I worked with my colleague, Senator *Ben Nelson* to search for ways to achieve enough savings to pay for additional funding for the LIHEAP program in fiscal year 2006.

Senator *Nelson* and I filed an amendment on October 26, 2005 to increase LIHEAP funding by \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2006. This would provide a 73 percent increase in funding over fiscal year 2005 levels. The increase would be offset with \$1.6 billion from three tax provisions that either close tax loopholes or clarify and bring greater consistency to current law. We believe that these offsets are balanced--all three have gained support in the Senate in the past--and we believe that our colleagues could support their use as an offset for the LIHEAP program.

I would like to add even more funding to LIHEAP, but with the offsets Senator *Nelson* and I were able to identify, we were able to file an amendment that would increase funds by \$1.6 billion.

Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to vote on the Carper/Nelson amendment during consideration of the fiscal year 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill. I will continue to search for ways to increase LIHEAP funding and likewise will continue to search for additional offsets to help pay for such an increase.

I believe in the LIHEAP program; I believe it serves a vital function in

helping as many as 5 million low-income households who need a bit of help paying their energy bills or weatherizing their homes.

However, I also believe that as Americans, we can and must find ways to pay for our priorities. LIHEAP is worth funding, and it's worth paying for.